

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 EURE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-11

INR-09 LAB-06 NSAE-00 RSC-01 SIL-01 DODE-00 PM-09

H-02 L-03 NSC-10 PA-03 PRS-01 SS-14 USIA-12 DOTE-00

FPC-01 HEW-08 INT-08 NIC-01 CU-04 RSR-01 T-03 OMB-01

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P 091704 Z MAR 73

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9559

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 02843

E. O. 11652: N/ A

TAGS: ELAB, UK

SUBJECT: LABOR UNREST IN BRITAIN: DEVELOPMENTS

REF: LONDON' S 2480

1. SUMMARY: WEEK ENDING MARCH 9 SAW CONTINUED LABOR UNREST AND PROTEST OVER THE GOVERNMENT' S COUNTER-INFLATION POLICIES. RAIL SERVICES WERE COMPLETELY SHUT DOWN MARCH 8 AS RESULT OF LOCOMOTIVE ENGINEERS' 24- HOUR STRIKE AND THOUSANDS OF GAS CONSUMERS, PARTICULARLY IN INDUSTRY, HAVE BEEN SERIOUSLY HIT BY GAS WORKERS INDUSTRIAL ACTION. MANY HOSPITALS CRITICALLY AFFECTED BY ANCILLARY WORKERS' STRIKES AND SLOWDOWNS. MINERS' PAY DISPUTE MOVED BACK INTO LIMELIGHT AS COAL BOARD REJECTED INCREASED HOLIDAYS DEMAND. END SUMMARY.

2. SITUATION IN CONTINUING STRIKES AND PROTESTS OVER GOVERNMENT WAGE POLICY IS AS FOLLOWS:

A. RAILS -- BRITAIN WAS GRIPPED MARCH 8 BY MASSIVE UNCLASSIFIED

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TRAVEL CHAOS AS TRAIN DRIVERS STAGED THE SECOND OF THEIR ONE- DAY PAY STRIKES. THERE WERE NO PASSENGER TRAINS AND COMMUTERS WHO TOOK TO THEIR CARS FOUND THEMSELVES IN MONSTER TRAFFIC JAMS. MANY THOUSANDS IN LONDON AND THE LARGER CITIES WERE UNABLE TO GET TO WORK. IN ADDITION COMMUTER SERVICE TO LONDON, PARTICULARLY IN MILITANT- DOMINATED DENSELY POPULATED SOUTHERN REGION, HAS BEEN SEVERELY CURTAILED ALL WEEK (AND LIKELY TO CONTINUE) AS A RESULT OF THE UNION' S " NON- COOPERATION" POLICY AND OVERTIME BANS. LONDON UNDERGROUND SERVICE WAS AT 50 PERCENT MARCH 8. ASLEF, THE DRIVERS' UNION, HAS ALSO SET STRIKE SUNDAY MARCH 11 AND EVERY SUBSEQUENT SUNDAY UNTIL SETTLEMENT REACHED. AS OF MARCH 9 THERE HAD BEEN NO SIGNIFICANT MOVEMENT TOWARD A SETTLEMENT. UNION IS SEEKING TO " RESTRUCTURE" PAY ARRANGEMENTS WHICH IN PRACTICE WOULD PIERCE PHASE TWO GUIDELINES. A BITTER INTER- UNION SITUATION IS DEVELOPING BETWEEN ASLEF AND THE NUR (TRAINMEN, PORTERS, SIGNALMEN, ETC.) OVER ASLEF' S TACTICS WHICH ARE PREVENTING GENERAL WAGE NEGOTIATIONS FOR ALL RAILMEN.

B. GAS -- SLIGHT HOPE FOR AT LEAST AN INTERIM SETTLEMENT OF THE THREE- WEEK OLD GAS STRIKES WAS RAISED MARCH 9 AS THE UNIONS CONSIDERED NEW PROPOSALS BY THE BRITISH GAS CORPORATION INVOLVING FRINGE BENEFITS. MANAGEMENT' S MOVE WAS ENOUGH TO PERSUADE THE UNIONS TO POSTPONE PLANNED ESCALATION OF INDUSTRIAL ACTION WHICH WOULD AFFECT ADDITIONAL HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF CONSUMERS. THUS FAR REDUCED PRESSURES HAVE HIT 4 MILLION HOUSEHOLD USERS AND UPWARDS OF THREE THOUSAND FACTORIES, AND CAUSED COMPLETE SHUTOFFS FOR 50,000 WEST MIDLANDS CONSUMERS. MANY SCHOOLS HAVE BEEN CLOSED. THE UNIONS ARE SEEKING AROUND THREE POUNDS WEEKLY BUT HAVE BEEN OFFERED TWO POUNDS 24 IN LINE WITH GOVERNMENT PHASE TWO LIMITS. UNIONS AND MANAGEMENT HAVE BEEN COOPERATING IN DISTRIBUTION OF AVAILABLE SUPPLIES, ADHERING TO SAFETY PRECAUTIONS, AND ALTHOUGH HIGH RISK CONTINUES THERE HAVE THUS FAR BEEN NO EXPLOSIONS OR ACCIDENTS.

C. HOSPITALS -- AT LEAST 257 HOSPITALS HAVE BEEN UNCLASSIFIED

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AFFECTED BY ANCILLARY WORKERS' STRIKES, OVERTIME

BANS AND GO- SLOWS, WITH THE GOVERNMENT ESTIMATING THAT BEDS OUT OF SERVICE MARCH 9 TOTALLED ABOUT 18,000. IN SOME AREAS WORKERS HAVE BEEN COOPERATING IN PROVIDING EMERGENCY LAUNDRY SERVICES, AND SOME HAVE GONE BACK TO WORK, BUT BY AND LARGE THERE HAS BEEN NO SOFTENING OF THE UNION' S POSITION. INTENSIFIED ACTION IS PLANNED. THE GOVERNMENT' S GUIDELINES PERMIT ONE POUND 88 BUT THE UNION IS HOLDING OUT FOR A FOUR- POUND WEEKLY INCREASE. LOWER- PAID PORTERS, COOKS, CLEANERS AND LAUNDRY WORKERS ARE INVOLVED. THERE HAS BEEN NO MOVEMENT TOWARD SETTLEMENT IN A SITUATION DESCRIBED IN THE PRESS AS " FRIGHTENING."

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

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D. MINERS -- CHANCES OF INDUSTRIAL ACTION APPEARED TO MOUNT MARCH 9 AFTER THE COAL BOARD INFORMED THE UNION THAT IT WAS UNABLE UNDER TERMS OF PHASE TWO TO GRANT ANOTHER WEEK. S VACATION. THE UNION HAS BEEN DEMANDING INCREASES OF UP TO SEVEN POUNDS PLUS

LONGER HOLIDAYS, BETTER PENSIONS, SICK PAY AND OTHER BENEFITS. AN OFFER OF TWO POUNDS 29 A WEEK, WITHIN THE PHASE TWO NORMS, HAS ALREADY BEEN REJECTED. THE UNION'S EXECUTIVE BOARD IS TO MEET MARCH 9 TO DETERMINE ITS NEXT MOVE. UNION RULES REQUIRE A 55 PERCENT RANK AND FILE VOTE FOR A STRIKE. HOWEVER, THE UNION COULD DECIDE ON SELECTIVE AREA STRIKES, SLOW- DOWNS AND OVERTIME BANS.

E -- FORD -- UNREST AT FORD HAS CONTINUED TO SIMMER, WITH SPORADIC STRIKES AND SLOWDOWNS CAUSING CONSIDERABLE PRODUCTION LOSSES. MILITANTS HAVE THUS FAR BEEN UNABLE TO STIMULATE ACROSS- THE- BOARD STRIKE ACTION AT ALL 21 FORD PLANTS (52,000 WORKERS). UNIONS INVOLVED ARE CONTINUING TO PRESS MANAGEMENT
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FOR IMPROVEMENT OF ITS WITHIN- PHASE TWO OFFER OF TWO POUNDS 40 WEEKLY. UNIONS ARE SEEKING UP TO 10 POUNDS WEEKLY PLUS OTHER CONCESSIONS. IF THIS IS NOT FORTHCOMING BY THE END OF MARCH (AND THIS IS HIGHLY UNLIKELY) THE UNIONS WILL CONSIDER OFFICIAL STRIKE ACTION. GIVEN WHAT APPEARS TO BE AT THIS POINT A MOOD OF THE MAJORITY AGAINST THIS, THE UNIONS MIGHT OPT FOR SLOWDOWNS, SELECTIVE STRIKES AND OVERTIME BANS, ALL VERY COSTLY TO THE COMPANY.

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